

Exhibit J

TV options sign of soccer's growth

Orlando Sentinel (Florida)

June 18, 2015 Thursday, FINAL

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Section: SPORTS; FLORIDA; Pg. C2; Commentary

Length: 885 words

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Body

The clock in my sixth period classroom at Carl Sandburg Middle School in Alexandria, Va., could not have moved any slower.

I remember watching the minute hand tick down toward the bell, knowing my school day was ending early. It was an annual tradition. My mother agreed to pick up me and my teammate, Danny Eder, from school early to take us home in time for the UEFA Champions League final.

At that time, the final was a Wednesday game that kicked off at 2:45 p.m. If we waited for school to end, there was no way we'd catch the whole game. It was also one of the few quality European soccer games broadcast on television and readily available in the U.S., so there was only one rational solution: Leave school early, order General Tso's chicken and watch the game at my house, cheering along with every goal during the game.

There were not many other chances to experience the best soccer in the world.

It was so rare to catch good games on TV that I had to order the Roma-Parma game on pay-per-view in 2001 just to see Francesco Totti lead his hometown club to its first Serie A crown since 1983. Danny was there for that one, too, laughing along with me as Roma fans stripped Totti of his shorts in the final minutes of the win.

Times have changed.

If you want to know why soccer has become so popular in the United States, just look at how readily available the sport is now to young fans.

Every single English Premier League game is broadcast on NBC Sports Network. The Serie A and Spanish La Liga can be seen on beIN sports. Want to catch some German Bundesliga matches? Starting this year, you can just flip on Fox Sports.

This is how soccer is growing in the U.S., organically and through generations that now have access to soccer in ways they never did before. Whereas I bought VHS videos from Eurosport magazine to learn about Manchester United in the late 1990s, now you just need cable.

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Even with the European leagues out of season, this looks to be the summer of soccer in the U.S. If you wanted to watch a game during the past weekend, there were plenty of options between the Women's World Cup, MLS, Copa America, World Cup qualifiers, European Championship qualifiers and FIFA Under-20 World Cup. The Gold Cup will be on TV starting in July.

And people are watching. Just look at the TV ratings for the EPL (479,000 viewers per match) or the Women's World Cup (5 million viewers for the U.S. game on Tuesday) or the Champions League final (2.2 million viewers).

Of course, MLS does not have those types of TV numbers and many critics argue the league suffers because fans have such easy access to better soccer in Europe.

I would argue MLS has benefited greatly from that access.

There is a reason millennials have become the key demographic supporting the league, and why it means something when homegrown players sign with their local teams.

People are growing up with soccer now, and their knowledge of the game and top players has increased significantly from even 10 years ago. A few years back, a friend's 10-year-old son could recite Barcelona's starting lineup from memory.

That kid is a teen now. And his family now owns Houston Dynamo season tickets.

MLS power rankings

With just five games on during the weekend, there was not much movement in the Winter Park MLS Coffee Club rankings.

- *1. Seattle Sounders -- 9-4-2 -- (Last week: 1): Seattle made the biggest impression of the weekend, smashing FC Dallas 3-0 at home and cementing itself as the top dog.
- *2. Sporting Kansas City -- 6-2-6 -- (Last week: 2): Sporting KC was idle during the weekend, but it will have a chance to make an impression Sunday against Real Salt Lake.
- *3. Vancouver Whitecaps -- 8-6-2 -- (Last week: 4): Another team with a bye week, the Whitecaps had a full week to prepare for a trip to the East Coast against NYRB.
- *4. D.C. United -- 8-5-4 -- (Last week: 3): One of the top 10 teams to take a loss, United showed fight on the road during a 1-0 loss to Orlando. D.C. proved it is tough to beat.
- *5. Toronto FC -- 6-5-1 -- (Last week: 5): It will be interesting to see how Toronto FC looks this weekend against a suddenly surging NYCFC team.
- *6. New England Revolution -- 6-4-6 -- (Last week: 7): The Revolution broke their winless streak and looked a bit more like the team we expected to see this season.
- *7. Portland Timbers -- 6-5-4 -- (Last week: 6): We're not sure yet what to make of this Portland team, but the Timbers have a chance to get three points at home this weekend against Houston.

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*8. FC Dallas -- 6-5-4 -- (Last week: 8): Getting smashed on the road apparently wasn't enough to convince all of the voters to drop Dallas. The team needs a result on the road in Colorado.

*9. L.A. Galaxy -- 5-5-7 -- (Last week: 9): A draw on the road against Columbus is not an awful result, and the Galaxy will be favored to win Saturday against Philadelphia.

*10. Orlando City -- 5-5-5 -- (Last week: 10): The unbeaten streak is now at five games, and the Lions are starting to look more and more like a playoff team.

Game of the week

Sporting Kansas City at Real Salt Lake, 10 p.m. Sunday, Fox Sports 1

The Buzz: This is one of the better rivalry games in MLS, and I'd expect another emotional game in Sandy, Utah, on Sunday night.

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Graphic

PHOTO: Abby Wambach and the U.S. squad drew 5 million viewers for their victory over Nigeria. DARRYL DYCK/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Load-Date: June 18, 2015

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